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VIEWPOINTS

WHAT IS A PROFESSION?*

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DEFINITIONS

THE SHORTER Oxford English Dictionary lists no less than seven distinct meanings for the word "profession", while H. W. Fowler does not tackle the problem at all. From the "oldest profession in the world" down to some more modern uses—such as exemplified by "sanitary engineer" for plumber, "mortician" for undertaker and "orbital tactician" for professional football player—the word has lost any claim to precision. Even a legal definition is not much more helpful. It reads as follows: "A profession is a self-selected, self-disciplined group of individuals who hold themselves out to the public as possessing a special skill derived from education and training and who are prepared to exercise that skill primarily in the interests of others."[1] One may be forgiven for seeking refuge with C. L. Dodgson (Lewis Carroll) when in the words of Humpty-Dumpty he said: "When *I* use a word it means precisely what *I* choose it to mean, nothing more, nor less."

HISTORICAL

In early days there were three so-called learned professions: divinity, law and medicine. Their origins arose from a need for individuals, acceptable by the community, as competent to administer the spiritual and corporal needs of the individual and to legalize and regulate the disposal of his worldly goods. It is an interesting and sobering reflection on human values and attitudes that, to the present day in many parts of the world, pure educators, although charged with the responsibility of the basic education for the three traditional professions, are denied public acceptance of their existence as a professional entity with distinctive rights and privileges. Historically, teachers themselves were members of one of the three learned professions and acquired their status through this preparation rather than by any separate identity. There is no doubt that the public school system, with its emphasis on state employment, has retarded to some extent the organization of educators into a separate and distinct profession.

What then constituted a profession in the original historical meaning? Here it is important to note that the earliest universities were founded primarily to prepare students for the professions. This objective has continued to constitute the fundamental relationship between the universities and professional bodies. On the few occasions in history when the traditional ties between a profession and university preparation has waned, the profession has fallen to a very low level. At the turn of this century, doctors in the United States were turned out by so-called "diploma mills", centres not associated with an accredited university. Until the Flexner Commission corrected this state of affairs the standards of medical practice and professional conduct in the United States were at their lowest ebb.

Secondly, the university was responsible for the education of a candidate *prior to* his acceptance for professional training. Is it too much to ask that a primary and essential prerequisite to professional training should be a liberal arts education in a university? If there is one thing that ought to separate the professional area from those areas that are not, it is on the basis of education in its broadest terms, on a knowledge of the cultural streams of our Western society and on an understanding of the relation of man to his environment.

Additionally, in the context of the early days of professionalism, one had to show evidence of being a "gentleman" as well as a "scholar" before being allowed into a profession. A "gentleman" in the historic sense meant a person of gentle birth; one could only be born a "gentleman" but in addition there were assumed qualities of good moral character. Few can regret that the restriction of birth, placed on the word gentleman, has passed away. There is still, however, the implication of standards of acceptable morality and character expected from members of a profession. The supervision of this area represents one of the important duties of a professional organization.

"Scholarship", although changed in curricular content and narrowed by the avid demands of specialization toward technical material, is still observed by required attendance at a university prior to formal professional training. Recently, in view of the growing length of professional courses, there have been demands to abridge even further this period of scholarship. Apart from the goal of excellence that is the common basis of every profession worthy of the name, there is another serious reason, important to society, why standards of university scholarship, with emphasis on the humanities, must be retained as a preliminary to professional training. Schumpeter[2] states, "All those who are unemployed, or unsatisfactorily employed or unemployable, drift into vocations in which standards are least definite or in which aptitudes and acquirements of an indifferent order count . . . They enter these vocations in a thoroughly dis-

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contented frame of mind. Discontent breeds resentment." It is partly for this reason that the requirements for admission to any professional group should be definite and definable, not vague and diffuse.

In this brief account of the origin of the professions, the basic, indeed essential element is established, namely conception and birth within a university. A profession inherits the ideas and ideals of a university: scholarship and research with the single aim of excellence. Without this idealism born in a university, a profession cannot begin to exist.

Legal Status

The second basic essential of a profession is legal status. A profession must acquire a statutory basis in the law of the country. In effect, there is thus created a mutual exchange of definable values between the state and the professional group. For the profession to exist as a recognizable group it is mandatory that the public grant to the professional body, by legislative statute, more or less tangible monopolies, along with self-governing privileges. By statute a professional group is granted the exclusive right of performance in a specific field, be it the practice of law, medicine or engineering. Along with this goes the right to determine its own fee structure or its salary levels. It is of course assumed that this right will be exercised by the professional group with discretion and always with the implied condition that no one shall be denied essential professional service for any reason. Not for reasons of race, creed, religion or ability to pay can needed professional service be refused without laying oneself open to a charge of non-professional conduct. It is with this important qualification that the right of self-determination of the fee structure exists. That this right is sometimes abridged by governmental or private agencies is due to weakness within the professional organization.

In return for this monopolistic right of practice and pay, enjoyed by professions, there is a reciprocal commitment to admit to its circle only individuals of proved competence, to guarantee their trustworthiness, to insist on the observance of an ethical code of conduct, and to protect the public against bungling and extortion.

No profession can exist without this protection under the law. It alone must have the right to set conditions of entrance. It alone must have the right to set codes of professional conduct. It alone must have the right to determine the values of professional competency. It follows from this that it alone must exercise discipline over its members and, with due regard to basic human rights, remove delinquents from its lists. Doctors are stricken from the rolls, lawyers disbarred, priests defrocked.

Let no one underestimate the weight and gravity of this disciplinary power. It takes little account of contemporary standards of work hours, of limits of fatigue, of expectations of monetary compensation, in its stern view of professional duty. There are hard-won and creditable gains accomplished by the growth of the trade union movement in ameliorating and raising the standards of living of the labouring man and of the craftsman. These gains have had no effect on the meaning of professional duty. One can be as guilty of the professional crime of abandonment of a patient at three o'clock in the morning as at ten. The forty-hour week, fatigue, and non-payment of fee weigh nothing as a defence in the professional judgment of this offence. Occasionally, in professional circles, an envious eye is turned to the gains toward a life of regular hours with regular pay achieved by unions by collective bargaining. But never have these achievements become serious considerations in the goals of a profession.

THE GOVERNMENT OF A PROFESSION

The internal government of a profession must lie with its own membership and it must be on the broadest possible democratic basis. No profession can continue to exist if its internal control falls into the hands of government appointees or party representatives. The power of a professional body is great; it includes the denial of entrance and, in extreme cases, the power of expulsion. This is a power too great to be entrusted to the hands of a bureaucracy. It is the duty of government to see that this power is not abused but is used wisely and fairly in the interests of society. But in democratic society, it is not within the right of government to exercise this power by itself.

REMUNERATION

What should be the price that society, either collectively or individually, should pay for a professional service?

Historically, the professional received not a salary nor a fee but an honorarium. Until early in this century doctors in England did not submit a statement of fees but were paid by their patients on a voluntary basis that reflected the financial status of the patient rather than the service rendered. And today in spite of the generality of the "fee-for-service" basis of professional claims, there is a tacit understanding that neither the quality nor the essential quantity of the service is limited by the size of the fee. The honorarium has almost completely disappeared. In all the professions, including the medical, substantial numbers have departed from the traditional "fee-for-service" basis to a straight annual salary. There are many in the professions who deplore this trend as an indication of the degradation of professional status to that of a craft, with the comment that "we are becoming just another bunch of employees".

So long as the professional association remains strong, so long as its standards are upheld, so long as entrance into it is controlled by the professional

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body and by none other, and so long as the association commands respect from the general community, these fears appear to be groundless. Of greater importance than the technique of remuneration, whether by fee or salary, is this essential condition: That the motivation of service to society, the hallmark of a true profession, should be properly rewarded. "We must recognize that one important factor in the unwillingness of youth to undertake certain critical tasks is due to a rather severe imbalance in our current system of incentives. The skills that we need most critically today are not those we reward most highly."[3] Today we are worried about increasing failure in attracting prospective doctors and, more particularly, educators to these vitally important fields. Our scale of material and social rewards and incentives reflects an attitude in which these fields are not accorded a very high priority. If teachers today and doctors tomorrow are not adequately paid, it is at least in part because society still fails to evaluate essential social contributions on a scale comparable to business gain. In the affluent society of John Galbraith, with its areas of "private wealth and public squalor", too often has dedication to society resulted in personal sacrifice. But the correctives for this state are not by the methods of remuneration, be it fee or salary, but by the maintenance of high professional standards and strong professional organizations.

THE SPIRIT OF A PROFESSION

And finally, having been sired by a university and given corporate structure by the law of the land, what is it that breathes life into a profession, gives it character, personality, spirit and soul?

One can take as a text this line from the Sermon on the Mount, "Whosoever shall compel thee to go one mile—go with him twain." Professor Wickenden, speaking before the Engineering Institute of Canada, had this to say:

"Every calling has its mile of compulsion, its daily round of tasks and duties, its standard of honest craftsmanship, its code of man-to-man relations, which one must cover if he is to survive. Beyond this lies the mile of voluntary effort, where men strive for excellence, give unrequited service to the good, and seek to invest their words with a wide and enduring significance. It is only in this second mile that a calling may attain to the dignity and the distinction of a profession."

Herein exists the area of the conscience of the individual member of a profession, his own personal and private sense of dedication to society. It is in this subtle area of private endeavour that a profession, in its totality, achieves greatness. Sometimes it is called professional spirit. It is the result of the association of men and women of superior type with a common ideal of service above gain, excellence above quality, self-expression beyond pecuniary motive and loyalty to a professional code above individual advantage.

Furthermore, no professional man can evade the obligation to contribute to the advancement of his group. His own knowledge is part of a common fund, built up over the centuries, an inheritance which he freely shares but to which he is obligated to add. Hence the duty to publish freely the fruits of his research and to share any advances in professional technique.

THE PROFESSIONS AND HUMAN PROGRESS

Aside from service in specific areas of society's needs, have professions any other value? Do they represent any significant position in humanity's tortured climb, and do they point to any area of hope in a troubled world?

Democratic so-called free societies are faced with a great dilemma: either to become increasingly socialized with an inevitable restriction of personal freedom; or to go back to nineteenth century laissez-faire, with emphasis on unrestricted personal freedom, and a reluctance to enter the sphere of social planning. The extremes of these divergent paths are intolerable to many of us, rooted as we are in the Hellenic philosophy respecting the dignity and worth of the individual. In both extremes the individual is sacrificed, on the one hand to the power of the bureaucrat, on the other to the power of the entrepreneur. Is there a middle course? If there is a middle way, it lies not with an all-powerful government employing as civil servants its teachers and its doctors, its lawyers and its engineers, and ultimately stifling these all-important areas of personal freedom. If there is a middle way, it lies not in the unrestricted power of the entrepreneur to whom the burden of the distribution of social services becomes an intolerable restriction on profit.

Alfred North Whitehead[4] wrote: "The effectiveness of a solution to this dilemma demands institutions founded upon professional qualifications. The most important function of professional institutions lies in the supervision of standards of individual professional competence and of professional practice. In this area the problem of personal freedom is resolved. For it is not opinions that are censored but the degree of learning and ability. Thus, in the more important fields of thought, opinion is free and so are large differences of practice. Society is thus provided with objective information as to the sort of weight to be attached to individuals and as to the sort of freedom of action that may safely be granted. Whatever is done can be subjected to the test of general professional opinion acting through its institutions. The impact of this professional freedom can be important to non-professional areas. For the professional organizations should be able to demonstrate the dangers of extravagant notions."

It was a professional organization, the Canadian Bar Association, in assembly that felt free to censure the Canadian Government's handling of the post-war spy trials, by the following resolution: "It is

recommended that the Association go on record in uncompromising support of the rule of Law, and of strongly disapproving any action by government or by any individual or organization which infringes in any degree the freedom of the subject under the law."[5]

As an example, in the teaching profession neither the general community nor the government is competent to determine either the subject matter to be taught or the permissible deviations to be allowed. Nor can the community or the government determine individual competence. There can be only one appeal. This is to the general professional opinion as indicated by the practice of accredited professional institutions. The State of Tennessee did not err in upholding the principle that there are limits to the freedom of teaching in schools and colleges. But it exhibited gross ignorance of its proper function when it defied a professional opinion which was practically unanimous.

Professional organizations thus became a bulwark against the invasion of individual freedom. In a world of growing restrictions there is need of such bulwarks, a need far greater than the average man realizes.

Excellence—a Common Meeting Ground

Professional organizations, because they are born out of universities, whose central creed is aptly summed up in a single phrase "the striving for excellence", can be a unifying influence in a clashing, strident world of opposing political ideologies. Excellence is the common meeting ground, the common denominator of all professional organizations, be they East or West.

There is much less separating physicians, teachers, lawyers and engineers true to their professional credo, from whatever corner of the world they derive, than there is between their respective politicians made rigid by fixed attitudes. Witness the cultural and scientific exchange that can go on, even if limited by security considerations, in a bi-polar world. This is an avenue that can never be closed, that may yet lead to the broad highways of peace. And there is hope that this may be an avenue to some common ground between clashing ideologies not in outer space, not on the moon, but right here on earth.

Summary

The development of professional responsibility had its birth in the university, was granted corporate form by the law of the land, and was given the breath of life by the aspiration toward excellence. A strong professional organization may become an important influence in the protection of freedom of the individual both within and without the profession. A profession can provide a durable bridge between conflicting ideologies.

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CASE REPORT

LIPOMATOSIS OF THE ILEOCECAL VALVE

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Lipomatosis of the ileocecal valve can be defined as the submucosal infiltration or accumulation of fat in the ileocecal region, usually resulting in non-specific gastrointestinal symptoms.

Synonyms are: Submucous lipoma of the ileocecal valve; ileocecal valve syndrome; pouting ileum; submucosal fatty accumulation of ileocecal valve; fatty degeneration of the ileocecal valve.

Etiology.—The etiology of this condition is unknown. Some writers have related it to an inflammatory process of the ileocecal region;[2, 9] others simply state that the condition occurs in obese individuals or in individuals with disturbances of lipid metabolism.[5, 6]

Incidence.—This condition occurs more frequently in women than men.[1-3] In the series of 18 patients studied by Lasser and Rigler,[2] only six were men. Lipomatosis of the ileocecal valve occurs chiefly in individuals over 45 years of age, although four patients have been reported between the ages of 30 and 43 years.[1-3] To 1959, all cases reported have apparently been in members of the Caucasian race.

Clinical features.—The condition may be asymptomatic, or the symptoms may be so insignificant that they are overlooked. The case presented in this report is an example of this condition with no apparent symptoms.

On the other hand, non-specific but definite symptoms may be present. In the cases reported in the literature, most of the patients have had long-standing gastrointestinal symptoms.[3] In Lasser and

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